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For Immediate Release
November 16, 2004

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BLM Sage-Grouse Interim Strategy Establishes Comprehensive Approach to Managing Sagebrush Habitat

The Department of the Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) today unveiled the final version of an interim national strategy outlining additional steps that it will take to maintain, enhance and restore sage-grouse habitat on America's public lands.

The interim strategy will guide BLM field offices until state- and local-level sage-grouse conservation plans developed in collaboration with state wildlife experts are completed and made part of BLM land-use plans. The sage-grouse is found in Montana, Wyoming, and western Colorado through Utah, Idaho, and Nevada to the western edge of the Great Basin in Washington, Oregon, and California.

"The national strategy is part of our three-pronged approach to sage-grouse management," said BLM Director Kathleen Clarke. "The first prong – BLM's 30 years of success in sagebrush conservation – forms the foundation for the second prong, the national strategy we are announcing today. These in turn will be incorporated into the third prong – the development of conservation plans for local and regional levels that turn our broad knowledge and experience into further action."

In managing sage-grouse as a special-status species, BLM has put in place numerous specific, enforceable requirements to protect sagebrush habitat in permits issued for grazing, recreation, mining, and oil and gas activities on the public lands the agency manages. The BLM manages half of the sage-grouse habitat remaining in the United States, about 57 million acres.

BLM managers at the State and Field office levels are currently developing management plans that address the highly variable conditions that exist in sagebrush habitats throughout the West. By identifying approaches to conservation that are already yielding on-the-ground success for sage-grouse across the West, the national strategy facilitates the work of identifying the resources and actions that are most appropriate for conditions in specific regions and locales.

Clarke noted the extensive cooperation among federal, state and local agencies in finalizing the strategy. "The importance of working with state wildlife agencies cannot be over-emphasized. National-level conservation goals can only be achieved by working with states on state-level strategies and by giving field managers flexibility in developing management plans that account for site-specific conditions," she said.



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The strategy outlines methods for assessing the risks to sage-grouse in various local habitats and identifies actions managers can take to address them that have proven successful in other places. These actions can be incorporated into the planning process when managers approve other uses of public lands, including energy development, livestock grazing, mining, recreation and fire management.

For example, managers might consider best management practices such as “greenstripping,” or removing old vegetation and replanting native vegetation, along access roads in areas where energy development occurs, Clarke said. This practice has been used successfully by BLM managers in northeastern Utah, and illustrates one way to conserve winter habitat for sage-grouse.

The strategy also encourages efforts such as the work of the Shoshone Basin Local Working Group in Idaho to manage BLM grazing allotments for both livestock forage and seasonal sage-grouse habitat requirements. The group’s plan maintains existing grazing levels while the acreage rated as “excellent” for sage-grouse increased from 2 percent of the allotment to 24 percent.

“The commitment of local stakeholders was the key to success in the Shoshone Basin,” Clarke said. “Local users brought important knowledge of range conditions and history along with a willingness to include private lands associated with the allotment in the plan.”

Another example is a BLM partnership with the owner of private land along the Utah-Wyoming border to remove decaying sagebrush. The partnership resulted in habitat restoration, a reduction in the threat of wildfire, and increased sage-grouse survival rates and lek counts in the treated area.

Yet another recent initiative re-established native forbs and grasses across the Utah’s Great Basin. This benefited sage-grouse and more than 350 other plant and animal species.

“We will continue to use the best available science and experience-based knowledge to form our management decisions and establish priorities for maintaining and restoring sagebrush habitats on public lands,” Clarke said. “Lek counts and inventories like those that have been underway around Bishop, Calif., and in southeastern Montana ensure that we can track the effects of our management decisions and adapt our plans for the future where necessary.”

Elements of the national strategy and subsequent conservation plans written by BLM State and Field offices will be implemented through the Bureau’s land use planning process.

Details about the BLM’s sage-grouse conservation program, including selected success stories and the full text of the national strategy and related guidance documents, are available on the agency’s Website: www.blm.gov/nhp/spotlight/sage_grouse/.

The BLM, an agency of the U.S. Department of the Interior, manages a total of 261 million surface acres. Most of this public land is located in 12 Western states, including Alaska. The Bureau also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation.

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